

The Rhetorical Précis

Overview: In order to concisely describe the argument and context an author presents in a text, academic writers sometimes use a format called the *rhetorical précis*. This form is a **highly structured four-sentence paragraph** that highlights the essential rhetorical elements in any text. The précis includes the name of the speaker/writer(s), the context or situation in which the text is delivered, the major assertion, the mode of development or support of the main idea, the stated and/or apparent purpose of the text, and the relationship between the writer(s) and the audience. The following is a breakdown of the information to include in each of the four sentences.

<p>SENTENCE 1 - include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the name of author, a phrase describing the author's credentials, the type and title of work, the date of work (inserted in parentheses), a <u>rhetorically accurate</u> verb (such as "assert," "argue," "suggest," "imply," "claim," "posit," etc.) that describes what the author is doing in the text, a THAT clause in which you state the major assertion (thesis statement/claim) of the author's text. 	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>In his 2005 book <i>The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America</i>, Jonathan Kozol, a scholar, writer, and activist who has devoted forty years to reforming education in America, [argues] that public education has abandoned lower income inner city children and their schools and teachers, essentially creating a system of educational apartheid.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 2 : An explanation of <u>how</u> the author develops and/or supports the thesis (for instance, <i>comparing and contrasting, defining, narrating, illustrating, using humor or sarcasm, relating personal experience, depending on facts /statistics /opinion</i>, etc.). Consider the author's organization, use of evidence, and/or strategies used to construct his/her argument. In essence in steps 2 and 3 you are accounting for the writer's <i>project</i>.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>Kozol supports his argument by [chronicling] his visits to 60 schools in 11 US cities, and his conversations with teachers and students. While much of his evidence is from primary research, he also cites secondary sources ranging from government statistics to scholars in the fields of education and sociology.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 3: A statement of the author's apparent purpose, followed by an IN ORDER TO phrase in which you explain what the author wants the audience to do or feel as a result of reading the work.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>Kozol's purpose is to make readers aware of the role race and class play in the unequal distribution of educational opportunities in the US [in order to] change public policy, funding, and public attitudes about education and entitlement.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 4: A description of the intended audience and the relationship the author establishes with the audience. Make note of language features (formal, informal, academic conversational, etc), modes of address, tone, mood, etc.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>Kozol is not addressing his argument to scholars or academics, and therefore eschews scholarly language. Instead he compels readers with vivid narratives of his interactions with teachers and students. His argument functions often through appeals to emotion, as well as his thoughtful and considered and impassioned ethos. He sounds informed, involved, measured.</p>

Templates for the Rhetorical Précis

Provided below are three templates you can refer to when using the rhetorical précis form. You may use these for guidance, but use your best judgment about how to form sentences appropriate to the text and/or author you write about.

1. (Author's credentials), (author's first and last name), in his/her (type of text), (title of text), published in (publishing info), addresses the topic of (topic of text) and argues that (argument).
2. S/he supports this claim by _____, then _____, and finally _____.
3. (Author's last name)'s purpose is to (author's purpose in writing) in order to (change in reader/society the author wants to achieve).
4. He/she adopts a(n) _____ tone for his/her audience, the readers of (publication) and others interested in the topic of _____.

1. In the (type of text), (title of text) ((year)), author (author's first and last name), (author's credentials), asserts that (argument) and suggests (explanation of sub-claims or resolution).
2. S/he backs up this claim by doing the following: first, s/he _____; next, s/he _____; last, s/he _____.
3. (Author's last name) appears to write in hopes of (author's purpose in writing) in order to (change in reader/society the author wants to achieve).
4. Because of the author's _____ tone, it seems as if s/he writes for a _____ and _____ audience.

1. In his/her (type of text) (title of text) ((year)), (author's credentials) (author's first and last name) asserts that (argument) by addressing _____, _____, and _____.
2. By supplying the reader with information about _____ and _____, (author's last name) builds his/her claims about _____.
3. (Author's name) wishes to convey to readers the importance of (author's purpose in writing) in order to (change in reader/society the author wants to achieve).
4. The author's audience likely consists of those interested in _____ as is evident through his/her references to _____ and _____; s/he addresses readers with a tone that is _____ and _____.